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HISTORY OF ARCHIVES KEEPING

The term 'Archives' may be defined as follows: "Those records of any public or private institution which are judged worthy of permanent preservation for reference and research purposes and which have to be deposited or have been selected for deposit in an Archival Institution". In this chapter we shall discuss the history of archival institutions from the earliest periods. These institutions have their own history. Archives had been created in different nations during different period. A brief survey of the history of Archival institutions is essential to make a proper study of Archives keeping.

The History of Archives keeping can conveniently be divided into two major divisions.

1) General History of Archives keeping.

2) History of Indian Archives Keeping.

General History of Archives keeping :

Archives should have originated even four or five centuries before the birth of Christ. Generally it is agreed that archives have been in existence among oriental people and among the Greeks and Romans. But it can be traced only when the era of writing came into existence. Since the written word came to common use the Archives were not unknown to the Assyrians, Persians, Babylonians and Egyptians. Record keeping was there in almost all the civilizations. However, it is

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important to remember that the survival of records, clearly archives in nature, does not be itself established the existence of Archives as an institution.

In the Bible we have got some reference about Archives. The verses of Old Testament refer to the existence of Archives. Thus from 5th Century BC there were information, evidence and sources of Archives keeping.

History of Archives Keeping in Ancient period

Archives Keeping among Greeks :

Archives have a hoary antiquity. Till 5th century BC we are not able to get information about archives keeping. Archival institutions probably had their origin in the ancient Greek Civilization. At first the Athenian general and statesman Ephialities (460 BC) was considered to be founded the Archival institution.

In the 5th and 4th century before Christ the Athenians kept their valuable documents in the temple of Mother of the Gods, that is Metroon, next to the court house, in the public square in Athens. The temple contained treaties, laws, minutes of the popular assembly, and other state documents. Among the documents were the statement of Socrates, wrote in his own defence, the manuscripts of model plays by Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, and the lists of the victors in the Olimpic games.

These writings were preserved and transmitted from the earliest times until perhaps the third century after Christ in the form of papyrus rolls. Although they are not now kept in Archival institutions, their initial preservation was in such institutions. The choice of a religious edifices, as a place providing both physical security and sanctity secured in the middle ages when the records of secular authorities were often safeguarded in the monasteries.

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Archives Keeping among Romans:

The Roman had better Archival practices than Greeks. The Romans kept their valuable records in the residence of Roman rulers. Subsequently the records were transferred to the house of the consuls. But by the 5th century BC the records had been transferred to a public building for security reasons. The main Archives was established by the statesman Valarious Publicola (509 BC) in the temple of Saturn. In these Archives there were national laws and decress, reports of officials from the process, proceedings of the Senate and the records concerned with finance. Here we can see the improved methods of maintaining records. It was a clear development.

It is understood that during the later period many Archives existed throughout the empire. Many regional Archives were established apart from central Archives. There were Municipal Archives, Provincial Archives, Military Archives and Religious Archives. The early Roman Emperors gave much attention to the preservation of public records.

Emperor Justinian, who ruled Rome between 527 and 565 A.D. is said to have laid down as follows: 'Let your Eminence give orders throughout each and every province that a public building be allocated, in which the records, choosing some one to have custody over them so that they may remain uncorrupted and may be found quietly by those requiring them and let them be among them an archives, and left that which has been neglected in the city he corrected'. There is among a modern tang in all that he was said.

The code of Justinan I (529 AD) had a separate section on Archives and Archivists. We are also able to get more information that the Archives were well maintained

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by career officials and some clerks. They organised the records on chronological basis and assigned numbers to the documents.

History of Archives Keeping during Medieval Period :

From 5th to 10th Century AD progress was not made in the development of Archival institutions. The rulers did not give importance to Archives. But from tenth century onwards the Medieval period States were occurred by religion. The Pope, Bishops and monks began to preserve the records. The monastries played a significant role in preserving the old records. The Roman Catholic monks in various monstries were actively engaged in copying old records. Thus emerged 'the Ecclesiastical Archives' which preserved the records pertaining to religious administration. Because the Roman Catholic Church inherited the practice of maintaining records. Thus during later medieval period archives keeping was revived in western and central Europe. The practice of gathering important records at a central place gained importance.

History of Archives Keeping during Modern Period

Archives Keeping in England:

From 9th century onwards England had Royal Archives. The location of the Royal Archives was the 'Treasury'. As they gave more importance to the records, they kept the records near treasury. But there was no fixed location. In the beginning of 12th century AD (1130 AD) the Archives was named as 'Archives of Exchequer'. During the time of king Edward I, the records were maintained in the "Tower of London". In 1578 Queen Elizabeth established an office for Archives, popularly known as "State record Office".

Archives Keeping in France :

–Though the principle and practice were varied in several countries, the pattern related the central repository was the same.

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The French people learned from England the method of keeping records in a central repository. Emperor Maximillan made an abortive attempt to set-up a central Archives. In 1543 the Archives of the "Crown of Festilla" was founded at Sionnaas by Charles X. Afterwards the establishment of Archives assumed importance.

Archives Keeping in Switzerland

In Switzerland the treasures for research are found in the Archives of each of the caontons rather than in the Bandasarchir (1788) or barrs.

Archives Keeping in Italy

Italy has no single central institution for state archives, but has a series of repositories united under the ministry of interior, which reflect the earlier division of the country.

Archives Keeping in Vatican City :

The modern Vatican city has its oldest Archives dating from the early period. Legislation in east European countries with highly organised central government has given the central Archives the right to inspect other Archives. In the first years of the 18th century Pope Paul V was the founder of the Privy Vatican Archives. In 1881, Pope Leo XIII opened the doors of the secret Archives to scholars. In later times increasing attention was given to business Archives and repositories for the preservation was established by firms, champers of commerce and other interested groups in Germany.

Archives Keeping in Netherland :

The Netherland has a central-State Archives and not only its Privy state Archives in Berlin but also repositories for records of the central administrators which were kept in

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the areas to which they pertained. The other sovereign states such as Barasia, Wutenburg and Badan, each maintained their own central Archives. The Riechsarchi and Postdam dated only from 1919. The Schism following World War II gave the general Federal Republic a Sunaraschi at Cobens and the German Democratic Republic a central Archives at Postdam.

Archives Keeping in Canada:

The public Archives of Canada have extensive holdings of original materials in them during the middle of the 20th century. These materials were supplemented by through long term copying programmes of Canadian found in the Public Record Office in London. The provinces maintain their own Archives. Throughout the country the usual Archival problems had arisen, and considerable attention was given to control the archives administration.

Archives keeping in USA :

The United States of America established its National Archives in 1934. It emerged as an important center for imparting and implementing new archival systems by applying science and technology in Archives.

Archives Keeping in Latin America :

The Archives of almost all the 20 Latin American republics have as their bases the records of the colonial government perior to independence. This relates them ultimately with the Archives of European countries. Like many of their counterpart in Europe the Archival institution often have been housed in former palaces. Climate has been a variable factor. In Brazil for example the hot humid air is one of the reasons why many of the colonial records no longer exist. In Chile on the other hand, the climate had

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been favourable. For this and other reasons the colonial period is well represented in the Archives.

Panama, the new republic, was the first to erect a building intended expressively as a 'National Archives'. It was established in 1912. Colombia was among the countries which easily provided for the elimination of useless Archives. El-Salvador, was the only one of the Latin American countries which had by 1950 established a national Archives.

Many of the records of the colonial period still remained in Guatalama although some had been turned over to El-salveder. Cuba, the last of the Republics to win its independence from the European parent country, over the foundation of its national Archives to the Spanish period of entire collections at the close of the Spanish regime. Few Archives in Cuba are dated 1800. Probably the largest collection of colonial Archives in Latin America survived in Maxico.

Archives keeping in Russia :

In Russia the communist regime gave a new dimention to the establishment and use of archives. On 1st June 1918, Lenin, by a decree asserted for archives as active and continuing role in support of Marxist - Leninist idealogy and in the developement of the Soviet state and society in the U.S.S.R. The use of archives as a political weapon of the state in support of official history written in long idealogical lines, has been adopted by a number of socialist countries following the second world war.

Africa

In the midst of 20th century, new development has taken place in Africa, Asia and Australia. The union of South Africa maintains a central Archives and repository in each state.

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Isreal had established a national Archives and from 1933 Zionist Central Archives. The Central Africa Archives at Sailabury was created in 1935. The Archival service of the republic of Congo was established in 1947 with photo copying equipments and a documentation centre.

Asia :

In India during the British regime the imperial Record department of the government of India was created in 1891. After the declaration of Independence in 1947, it was renamed the 'National Archives of India'. Pakistan has established an Archives of her own in 1948 after independence. Pakistan had the problem of copying in the Indian National Archives. Those records which bore directly upon its history but which could not be separated from those relating also to India.

Other Asian countries like china has a well established archival system started in 1534. From the very beginning, the Chinese gave emphasis on their manuscript wealth bearing their socio, economic and political matters. Many Asian countries established their Archives during the 20th century. ie Japan in 1971, Iran in 1970, Iraq in 1963, Singapore in 1967 and Srilanka in 1902.

The establishment of International Council of Archives in 1950 had a great impact on the establishment and developement of Archives in Asian countries particularly the Arab and African countries.

The Archives in African countries owe much to colonial rulers of the European countries like England and France which established archives for preserving their records. The International Council of Archives also added further assistance to modernise these archives. Many countries in Asia, Africa and Europe established their

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archives by means of legislation which formulated the organisation and administration of archives.

The outbreak of First world war and Second world war gave a new impetus which added further inspiration to establish National Archives because of the emergence of new nations and decolonisation. The newly independent and newly created states began to create national archical agencies for establishing their national identies and reconstructing their national histories by means of their archival sources.

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HISTORY OF INDIAN ARCHIVES KEEPING

India is an ancient nation. Before the art of writing introduced the people used to keep their words and deeds in "memory". So the ancient Indians used memory as the medium to preserve their ideas. There is some discussion when was Rigveda recorded. The verses of Rigveda was passed from one generation to another generation only through memory. Because it was easy for them to memorise the verses. When the art of writing was introduced the process of recording and preservation of records developed.

It is said that during the later half of sutra period the art of writing was introduced. People started writing on the walls, clay, wood and metal. They also used caves, leaves and animal skins as writing materials. Soon after the introduction of writing, the art of keeping records started. But we are not able to assign the exact period for this.

India, being the cradle of civilizations, had developed a sort of record management during early period itself. But those ancient records were not available to the later generations as those were damaged either by the invaders or by natural calamities. More over the people themselves did not realise the value of those records. Guided by the narrow considerations some records were kept secret as family assets and some were taken across the Indian shores.

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Pre-Buddhist period :

We have got one important composition namely 'Jatakas' during pre-Buddhist period. It is generally agreed by all the scholars that the Jatakas existed before Buddha. From Jatakas it is inferred that there was a process of moving a resolution on political matters. And the resolutions were moved in three times. Only after that it was declared as a law. Then it become a record. So we have got abundant sources regarding the creation and preservation of records.

The temporal powers were differentiated from Judicial powers. So Judiciary was separated from executive. So they preserved the records separately. Hence the existence of a short of Archives in the 6th century BC is confirmed.

Buddhist Period :

As far as Buddhist period concerned the people had got a clear idea about the preservation of records. The Buddhists used to assemble in a big hall called 'Buddhist Samgha'. In this hall each member was assigned to each seat. It was done by the Act of a special officer. They passed all religious laws only after proper discussion. Usually they moved the resolution for three times. The proceedings and the activities in the Buddhist Samgha were kept for precedents and reference.

If there was any dissent note that was also decided by vote. Mahagovinda, a Buddhist monk described the meetings in details. Separate seats were allotted for clerks. They were given the title of great kings. Their duty was to take down the observations made by the members. They entered the entire proceedings in the minute books. They remained the hall till the meeting was over. The Buddhist Samgha was considered as the most auspicious place. So it was described as the place for "meeting of the Gods". It

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was also called as "Sudhma Sabha" or the "Hall of the Good Laws". Out of these things what we understand is that the practice of creating and preserving the records was existed during Buddhist period. This was a well developed system.

Arthasastra :

Another recorded evidence of the existence of archives is found in the Arthasastra written by Kautilya. Arthasastra is called as the imperial code for governance and rulings. It was the creation during Maurian empire. This Arthasastra is comprised of nine volumes. We have reference in the second volume regarding various government departments and duties of respective officers. The fifth volume informs us the government activities.

"Usually the discussions were held in authorities and organised council. The discussions were kept in secret. All the decisions must be proceeded by discussion. Then the decision must be recorded in papers". It is also informed that the king was the creator of records. He had the power to create records. He created records with the help of "Lakshaka". Lakshaka was an individual equal to the rank of a minister. To become a Lakshaka, a person must have a good handwriting which must be noticed by all. His duty was to take down the oral transmission of the king in the records.

Arthasastra also mentions a word "Aksha patala". This Akshapatala is said to be the record office of the olden days. According to Shamasastri it means "office of accountants". But this meaning of the word was not acceptable by others. F.J.Manmohan was giving a different meaning. In his book "the early history of Bengal" he used the word Akshapatala. According to him it refers to "general record room". This meaning was supported by B.R.R.

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Dikshathar in his book "the Hindu Administrative Institution". K.P. Jeyaswal also in his book entitled "The Hindu Polity" tells that the meaning given by Shamasastri was not satisfactory. But the real meaning of the word Akshapatala is "General record office".

Hiun Tsang, the Chinese traveler, who visited India during 7th century (640 - 644) confirmed the existence of local records. He learned several things from local records. He also informs that "there were separate custodians for Archives". This shows that there was the practice of appointing custodians for Archives to preserve records. He mentions the Sanskrit word "Nilkapattu" (Nilopitu) which means "State or Government papers". This word has been described by Monier Williams, in his Sanskrit dictionary as "a collection of annals and Royal edicts and important things associated with state activities. Morrison in his Chinese dictionary has given the meaning of the word as a "Public record office". We can say Nilkapattu means a record office. This clearly shows the existence of well established Archives in ancient India.

Age of Guptas :

During the period of Guptas we come across several new officials of Archives. An inscription of Gupta period mentions the words Akshapttala Dhikara and Akshapattalikas. It is said that the government charter was written according to the order of Akshapattala Dhikara. Fleet gives us the literary meaning of this word, "one who is appointed to the duties of repository of legal documents". That is, "he is the custodian of legal documents". Thus we are able to understand the existence of record offices, availability of records and its maintenance by record officers during the age of Guptas.

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Chola Period :

In South India the Cholas had well maintained record office to preserve the royal orders. Palm leaves were used to note down the orders of Chola Emperor. Then Palm leave records were called as 'Olai'. They adopted a clear system for the creation of records. As they wanted to minimize the mistakes in the government orders, they appointed two officers for the purpose of creating records.

1) Olai officer
2) Olai Nayagam.

The Royal order (oral order of the king) was first taken by the Olai officer. There may be mistakes. So the draft was scrutinized by another officer called Olai Nayagam. Only after that the Olai came to be called as "Thittu". Then the "Thittu" will be entered into a permanent record book. The original was kept in the central record office and its copies communicated to the local chieftains for necessary action.

The permanent revenue records of the Cholas had two categories namely:

1) Variputhagam; 2) Variputhaga Kannakku.

Variputhagam was a record of land rates based on complete enquiries and accurate surveys. Variputhagakannakku was a register of demands about the statement of receipts and balance statements.

Thus the Cholas created with atmost care and kept it in a safe place to be used in future. They considered temples to be an important place to preserve the records. The following is the example of keeping records in the temple.

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"The famous tamil devotional composition Thevaram was composed by Appar, Sambandar and Sundarar. These three saints brought Thevaram to Chithambaram temple and placed it in front of the Deity Nataraja and before the priests. They requested the priests to keep Thevaram under safe custody in the temple and to return them only when they jointly returned and requested for them. Then they passed away. After their death it was not possible for them to come alive jointly. When others approached the priests for Thevaram the priests refused to give Thevaram. Raja Raja I, the great Chola Emperor went with the golden statues of the three saints and received the Thevaram written in palm leave from the priests. This tradition shows the role of temples in the preservation of records in those days.

Sukranithi :

It is a Sanksrit work written in palm leaves which has detailed accounts of a record office. It was first edited and published in the year 1882 by Gustab Oppert. Then it was translated into English by Sarkar.

Gustab Oppert was of the opinion that Sukranthi belonged to the Epic period. But Shiam Lal assigned Sukranithi to the Gupta period. As there is an indirect reference of gun powder scholars assigned the work to the Medieval period.

The Sukranithi gives us the information that the writing was initiated by Lord Brahma. It also deals with clauses and sub-clauses of record creation officers incharge of records and above all the records office. The Sukranithi clearly states that no government business could be carried out without records. These are the informations regarding Archives during medieval period.

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Delhi Sultanate Period :

The Delhi Sultanate had 36 departments. The departments were administered by the ministers. Each department had a record room. Then these records were sent to Diwani Dizarat. It was the central record office. A central minister was incharge of it. He was named as Dabir - I - Mamalik. He served as a private secretary of the Sultan. Here the 'imperial farmens', which were equivalent to modern government orders, were drafted. However the details of the record office during the period of Delhi Sultans are not available.

Vijayanagar Period :

During Vijayanagar period the famous travellar Abdur Razak visited Vijayanagar in 1442 AD. In his writing he refers one 40 pillared hall where records were kept reserved. Keladi, a vasal state of Vijayanagar had a record office at Ikkeri, where copper plates, pelmyra leaf books, kadikas and paper records were housed. This record office was destroyed in 1763 when Hyder Ali of Mysore attacked Ikkeri. So we understand the practice of preservation of records in the Vijayanagar period.

Mughal Period :

Akbar, the great had deep interest in preservation of records. In 1574 he created a record office at the advice of Abul Fazl. This office was used by Abul Fazl himself to write his book Akbarnama. In this book he gives an account of this record office:

"The building where the records were kept were called 'Deftar Kahana'. There were several clerks to copy the records. The officers of the Mughal government had to keep many accounts and copies of correspondences. So the Mughal

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government was called as 'Kagnazi Raj' meaning "government of documents".

There were provincial Archives under the control of Diwans. These Diwans sent records to imperial government called as Deftar-Diwan-I Ala. The Persian manuscript called khallaqus - slyag by Haider Beg also provides information regarding the organised system of record keeping under the Mughals.The practice of creation and preservation of records were continued till the last days Mughal emperor of Bahaduer Shah II.

Maratha Period :

The Marathas also had an excellent record office. The government had a separate department called 'Record Department' (Draftar khana) They appointed keeper of records (Draftadar). It is said that there were about two hundred clerks (karkans) in the Maratha secretariat employed in copying records. There were record offices in various districts too.

British period :

The advent of Europeans, particularly the British witnesed the production of records in large scale due to administrative growth in various dimensions and directions. They paid special attention for preserving their records by establishing archives both in national and regional level in the western model. The establishment of Imperial Records Department in Calcutta in 1898 (later National Archives of India) and Madras Record Office in 1909 (later Tamilnadu Archives) are examples of their archival sense.

They implemented western pattern of archival administrative systems not only in the collection and preservations of records but also in the assimilation of

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informations from them. The formation of Indian Historical Records Commission in 1919 witnessed the interest of British on Indian Records.

The Princely states in India too were not silent in Archive formation. Most of the Princely states in India had their own record repositories which were arranged and preserved in both native traditional systems and English Archival methods.

Conclusion :

Archival institutions have been established in almost all the nations. Archives are established and maintained mainly for the use of policy makers and policy executors. The public records have become an essential aspect of administration. These records were preserved because of the practical need of improving governmental efficiency.

Archives is an essential institution from the cultural point of view. It reflects the cultural traditions of a nation and its people. Public Archives are one among many types of cultural resources, which include books, manuscripts and museum treasures. Moreover public records obviously define the relations of the government with the governed. They are the ultimate proof for all activities of the people. So the modern nations give much importance to archives and pay due attention to archival administration.

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